



Good day Worthy Knights,

In this part 100, the Scholae Palatina

Wikipedia

The **Scholae Palatinae** were an elite military guard unit, usually ascribed to the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great as a replacement for the *equites singulares Augusti*, the cavalry arm of the Praetorian Guard.

The Scholae survived in Roman and later Byzantine service until they disappeared in the late 11th century, during the reign of Alexios I Komnenos.

### History and structure

During the early 4th century, Caesar Flavius Valerius Severus attempted to disband the remaining units of the Praetorian Guard on the orders of Galerius. In response, the Praetorians turned to Maxentius, the son of the retired emperor Maximian, and proclaimed him their emperor on 28 October 306.

When Constantine the Great, launching an invasion of Italy in 312, forced a final confrontation at the Milvian Bridge, the Praetorian cohorts made up the most prominent element of Maxentius' army. Later, in Rome, the victorious Constantine definitively disbanded the Praetorian Guard.

Although there is no direct evidence that Constantine established the Scholae Palatinae at the same time, the lack of a bodyguard unit would have become immediately apparent, and he is commonly regarded as their founder.

The term "schola" was commonly used in the early 4th century to refer to organized corps of the imperial retinue, both civil and military, and derives from the fact that they occupied specific rooms or chambers in the palace.

Each schola was formed into an elite cavalry regiment of around 500 troops. Many scholarians were recruited from among Germanic tribes. In the West, these were Franks and Alamanni, while in the East, Goths were employed.

In the East, under the impact of anti-Gothic policies, from the mid-5th century they were largely replaced with Armenians and Isaurians. However, evidence of the scholarians mentioned in primary sources indicates that the presence of native Romans in the scholae was not negligible.

Each schola was commanded by a Tribunus who ranked as a comes of the first class, and who were discharged with a rank equal to that of a provincial dux. The Tribunus had several senior officers called *domestici* or *protectores* directly under him. Unlike the Praetorians, there was no overall military commander of the scholae, and the Emperor retained direct control over them; however, for administrative purposes, the scholae were eventually placed under the direction of the magister officiorum.

In the *Notitia Dignitatum* of the late 4th century, seven scholae are listed for the Eastern Empire and five for the Western. In Justinian I's time (r. 527–565), but also possibly in earlier times, the scholae were billeted in the wider neighbourhood of Constantinople, in the towns of Bithynia and Thrace, serving in the palace by rotation.

As befitted their guard's status, the scholarians received higher pay and enjoyed more privileges than the regular army: they received extra rations were exempt from the recruitment tax and were often used by the emperors on civilian missions inside the Empire.

Gradually however, the ease of palace life and lack of actual campaigning, as the Emperors ceased to take the field themselves, lessened their combat abilities.

In the East, they were eventually replaced as the main imperial bodyguard by the *Excubitores*, founded by Emperor Leo I the Thracian, while in the West, they were permanently disbanded by the Ostrogoth ruler Theodoric the Great (ruler of Italy in 493–526).

Under Emperor Zeno (r. 474–491), they degenerated to parade-ground display troops: as it became possible to buy an appointment into the ranks of the *scholae*, and the social status and benefits this entailed, the units were increasingly filled with by the capital's well-connected young nobility.

Emperor Justinian is said to have caused panic amongst their members by proposing that they be sent on an expedition. Justinian also raised four "supernumerary" *scholae* of 2,000 men purely to raise money from the sale of the appointments. It seems that this increase was reverted by the same emperor later.

Forty *scholares*, named *candidati* for their bright white tunics, were selected to form the Emperor's personal bodyguard, and although by the 6th century they too fulfilled a purely ceremonial role, in the 4th century they accompanied the emperors on campaign, as for example Julian in Persia.



Clibanarii cavalry parading past Constantine Triumphal Arch. These units were created by Constantine the Great to replace the Praetorian Guards after their defeat at the Milvian Bridge.